

ACID COMMUNISM / NEW FUTURE

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“THE SPECTRE OF A WORLD WHICH COULD BE FREE”-

In his final unfinished manuscript, the late British cultural theorist and blogger Mark Fisher provides a possible antidote to the Jamesonian problem he spent years ruminating on: late capitalism's inescapable ideological hold and its paralyzing effects on social change. The solution is acid communism.

Fisher's trifecta of major ideas is understood best as a chronology. Being the back-swinging neoliberal consequence of 60s counterculture, 'capitalist realism' (it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism) is now the ideological inheritance of anyone born during or after Reagan. Millennials and younger have experienced *only* this vicious 'retro-maniacal' overlapping of culture: No new music, narratives, even emotions. Not only that but the looming end of the world is no longer looming nor ending; "it is being lived through... the world doesn't end with a bang, it winks out, unravels, gradually falls apart."¹ The end of the world is now only the long sterile future of cultural re-iteration, re-permutation, simulacrum ad infinitum, and "all that is left is the consumer-spectator, trudging through the ruins and the relics," working away our days, mourning our cancelled future. This is epitomized no better than by the realities of a Covid future. Forget our cancelled careers, will we ever party with our friends again?

The concept of 'hauntology' of culture encapsulates the nostalgic echo-chamber of the 90s and 2000s, a stasis that ushered in the 21st century typified by 50s samples in rap songs and endless film

¹ Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism*, zer0 books. 2008.

remakes and TV reboots. This 'slow cancellation of the future' set into us like a drug, collective psychic depression, not a choice but a pathological inability. As everyday life sped up, culture slowed down and reversed, subduing our expectations for the future.²

Fisher committed suicide in 2017. As Sarah Jaffe says, "it's fitting in a way for his readers now to be haunted by the things he'll never write."³ However, one can ascertain from its unfinished introduction, *Acid Communism* would have expanded Fisher's potential solution for these plights of this century. A new spectre is haunting the left now: the spectre of humanity's lost potential for revolution, of the dissipation of the spectre of communism, its own failure and its inability to diagnose the cause of that failure.

Acid communism would attempt to reclaim elements of the 60s counterculture that preceded capitalist realism, move beyond the pathological limitations of this time, and re-imagine the left's potential to achieve a new future beyond capitalism. Fisher identified a desire for experimental leftist politics to combat not only the stasis of culture, but the inability of leftist thought to look beyond its Past. If trendy theorizing fails to make concrete demands, we must turn away from this critical mode. Here the spirit and symbolism of psychedelics provide the means of achieving class consciousness in the Marxist sense by *rejecting realism entirely*, turning towards authentic counterculture, reintroducing desire, mystery, nuance, avant-garde, underground, the Adornian Other, the artist. Only by reviving counter cultural experiences of "sensuality and collectivity" can we imagine not just the end of capitalism but what comes after.⁴

² Fisher, Mark. *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology, and Lost Futures*, zer0 books. 2013.

³ Jaffe, Sarah. "Cybergothic Acid Communism Now." Communemag.com.

⁴ Fisher, Mark. Acid Communism (Unfinished Introduction). *K-punk*, 2018.

Is this just a desire to relive cultural glory days? Or given its chance, would Fisher's manifesto have been a major contribution to the post-left, a cultural spin on Marxist orthodoxy that fights hauntological mourning and capitalist realism with its own tools of cultural re-iteration? Is it worth the lost-future reminiscing?

Some also wonder if this is all such a great idea. Acid communism presumes the importance of thought and assumes that 'raised consciousness' will mean class consciousness. But there are dangers to staring too long in the mirror on LSD and there may be dangers to mass enlightenment: "Is such liberation of human consciousness desirable? Certainly. Achievable? Possibly. But pleasurable? Not always. Not essentially."⁵ Looking at Situationists International, the 60s Freak Left, and the pro-psychedelic militant radicals who attempted a full-scale artistic utopia, there are two dismal conclusions one could draw.

First, the window of possibility for this kind of social revolution may have already passed. Second, all of this idealism and culture was ultimately assimilated into the mainstream and the Academy as cultural criticism and mainstream fashions (i.e. Vivienne Westwood's punk or the beatniks). Is there any evidence this is avoidable? After all, capitalist realism is the consequence of neoliberal attempts to destroy the socialist experiments of the 60s and 70s. It's clear it succeeded at least in triumphing individualism over collectivism. While Fisher seems to think acid communism itself is a spectre, an inevitability for our time, the truth may be that we should not attempt to implement its tenets on a grand scale.



⁵ Colquhoun, Matt. "Acid Communism." *Krisis Journal for contemporary philosophy*, Issue 2, 2018: Marx from the Margins.

In his last years Fisher shifted from spectral critique to plans for escape, and acid communism wasn't his only idea. In his (in)famous 2013 essay "Exiting the Vampire Castle," Fisher notes the left is plagued by vicious in-fighting. What we now call 'call-out' culture he aptly described as 'moralistic' or 'bourgeois-identitarian leftism' - a witch-hunt all too reminiscent of its Protestant roots. Because he was writing about this phenomenon before the development of these buzzwordy linguistic frameworks, his critique is an authentic assessment of a new and concerning trend. Bourgeois politeness, respectability politics, and identitarianism were shifting left discourse away from class consciousness to identity-based guilt-tripping and factionalism. This condemnation and abuse (what he calls the Vampire Castle) are part of what we need to escape in order to overcome capitalist realism. (In fact, the mode of behavior is an element or a symptom of capitalist realism itself in its propagation of [social] Capital over camaraderie.)

Acid communism is already present in "Exiting the Vampire Castle." Fisher describes seeing Russell Brand perform a stand-up show "saturated with working class intelligence and not afraid to show it, and queer in the way that popular culture used to be" that was subsequently the basis for the bourgeois-identitarian left's labelling of Brand as a sexist pig.⁶ But it's Brand's kind of "psychedelic dismantling" of reality that Fisher saw as not just more effective but fatally necessary -- sexy non-PC proletarian communism over the "finger-wagging sermon" of those moralisers literally ruining the party. Crucially but subtly, Fisher reminds us that this condition in which "class has disappeared, solidarity is impossible, but guilt and fear are omnipresent" has permeated anarchist and communist spaces not only because of the far-right's

⁶ Fisher, Mark. "Exiting the Vampire Castle." Opendemocracy.net, 2013.

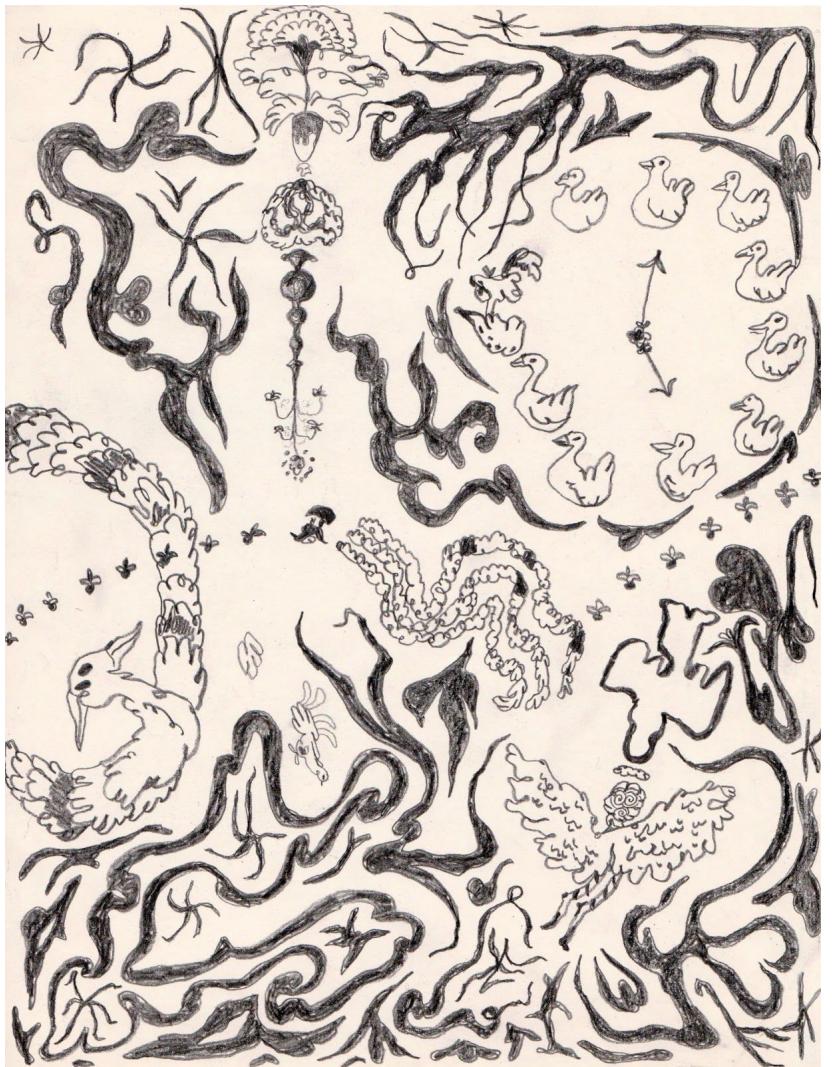
arousal, but because the movements on the left have been infected by the bourgeois and their modes of subjectivity.⁷ This state of affairs, impasse of the left (perhaps disappearance of the left), has only progressed since.

Fisher's call at the end of "Vampire Castle" is to reject identity politics and identity/individualism entirely, refocus on collective interest and desire and to re-educate about solidarity, fostering conditions wherein fear of exile does not accompany disagreement in discourse. Most young politically active people ('neo-anarchists') have experienced nothing *but* capitalist realism. With this "limited historical horizon" and experience, even those with budding political consciousness and anti-capitalist fervor will only end up re-implementing neoliberalism "with a small dose of social justice on the side" without the introduction of new/old modes presented by acid communism.⁸

Although the revolutionary demands of the late 70s that once seemed so inevitably close to manifestation never came to be, the existential conditions of the 21st century are even more promising. Or so Fisher thought in the 2010s. In 2020, uprisings in response to police brutality, Covid policy, and neoliberalism do seem to suggest a new revolutionary optimism, and the material conditions of life for the working poor necessitate the kind of collectivity, DIY culture, and anti-authoritarian sentiments that were prevalent in the 70s. However, the problems on the left and in general are detrimental to this potential moment for action. We must re-examine the historical narrative and re-implement class analysis over identitarianism to overcome bourgeois leftism. A new future could soon be just as inevitable as the endless capitalist wasteland once felt.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.



Time for Time

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